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Terrorism Assessment

December 22, 2014

NYPD Counterterrorism Bureau
Terrorism Threat Analysis Group

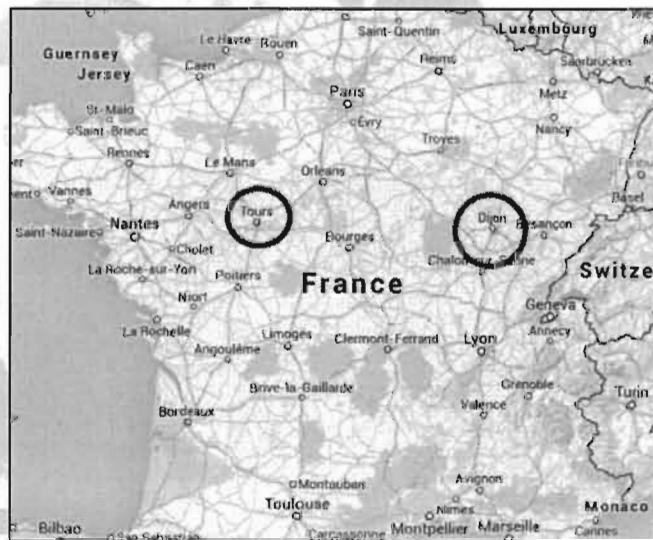
Open Source Assessment

Separate Attacks in Dijon and Tours, France

Information Cutoff: 10:00 a.m. on December 22, 2014

Key Points

- On Sunday, December 21, a 40-year old motorist rammed his vehicle into a number of crowds in the city of Dijon in eastern France, injuring 13 people.
- The driver, who authorities believe to be mentally unstable, was arrested by police after targeting pedestrians at five different locations in the city overnight. The driver was heard shouting "Allahu Akbar" (God is great) and is alleged to have said that he was acting "for the children of Palestine."
- The incident was similar to a series of vehicular attacks by Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank in November that left several dead and over a dozen injured.
- The incident came after a knife-wielding Burundi-born French national, Bertrand Nzohabonayo, seriously injured two police officers in a police station in the suburbs of Tours, in central France on Saturday, December 20. The 20-year-old attacker also allegedly cried "Allahu Akbar" during the assault.
- The assault prompted the French government to step up security at police and fire stations nationwide.



Incident Background

On Sunday, December 21, a driver rammed his vehicle into pedestrians at five separate locations in the French city of Dijon. Witnesses told police that the driver shouted "Allahu Akbar" and that he was acting "for the children of Palestine." Eleven people were lightly injured in the rampage, which lasted approximately half an hour. Two other victims remain in critical condition. The suspect, who has not been named, is reported to have been "mentally unstable," having previously spent time in a psychiatric hospital. Marie-Christine Tarrare, the chief prosecutor in Dijon, said the driver had no apparent links to terrorist groups abroad and acted alone, but was known to police for minor incidents dating back 20 years. Tarrare also said the suspect had been hospitalized 157 times for psychiatric problems since 2001, most recently this fall. The incident came after a knife-wielding Burundi-born French national, Bertrand Nzohabonayo, seriously injured two police officers in a police station in the suburbs of Tours, in central France on Saturday, December 20. The 20-year-old attacker also allegedly cried "Allahu Akbar" during the assault. Nzohabonayo

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had previously committed petty offences, but was not on a domestic intelligence watch-list, although his brother, Brice Nzohabonayo, is known for his radical views and once openly considered going to Syria. Bertrand Nzohabonayo also reportedly held radical views, and had an ISIL flag on his Facebook page on Thursday, December, 18. The assault prompted the French government to step up security at police and fire stations nationwide. On Monday, December 22, Burundi's National Intelligence Service reported that Brice Nzohabonayo had been detained in the capital Bujumbura shortly after his brother Bertrand attacked the police station in Tours. Authorities said they were seeking to establish if any attacks were being planned in Christian-majority Burundi, which is a contributor to the African Union force fighting al-Qa'ida-linked al-Shabaab Islamists in Somalia.

Threat Assessment

This weekend's incidents in France come as governments around the world brace for so-called "lone wolf" attacks by individuals returning from conflict zones abroad, or who are simply following the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL) calls for violence in the countries involved in the coalition fighting the group in Iraq and Syria. ISIL has on several occasions specifically called for attacks against France, which is believed to have approximately 1,200 nationals or residents involved in the conflict in Iraq and Syria. The two attacks also come on the heels of another attack in Sydney, Australia last week, where an Iranian-born Islamist with a history of extremism and violence entered a cafe and held people hostage for 16 hours. The siege ended with the deaths of two hostages and the gunman. The latest issues of several online jihadist publications have been tailored specifically to Western sympathizers, urging followers to conduct more frequent lone-wolf, small-scale attacks in the U.S. using any weapons readily available, including knives, firearms, explosives, or vehicles. The latest issue of *DABIQ*, ISIL's English-language magazine, called for all supporters of the group "especially" those in "the U.S., U.K., France, Australia, and Germany" to carry out strikes.

Implications for New York City

- Vehicle ramming is an example of a "low-tech" terrorism tactic used by groups to cause mass casualties against vulnerable targets such as open-air markets, festivals, or crowded gatherings, without requiring extensive training.
- Terrorists may use a combination of tactics ranging from vehicle ramming, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), small arms fire, and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices to maximize the lethality of their attacks.
- This attack highlights the importance of vehicle barriers and perimeter protection at locations where large crowds are gathered, as well as the vital role that public and private sector security personnel can play in identifying suspicious vehicles or driver behavior indicators such as erratic or accelerated driving that may indicate an imminent attack.

References

- [French Police Suspect Terror in Knife Attack by Man Shouting "Allahu Akbar."](#) RFI English. December 21, 2014.
- [Driver Ploughs Vehicle Into Pedestrians in France's Second Attack.](#) Channel News Asia. December 21, 2014.
- [Pedestrians Injured in France Hit and Run.](#) Al-Jazeera. December 21, 2014.
- [French Police Shoot Dead Knifeman Who Was Shouting Islamic Slogans.](#) *The Guardian*. December 20, 2014.
- [Burundi Arrests Brother of Suspect in French Police Attack.](#) France 24. December 22, 2014.
- [French 'Lone Wolf' Attacks Highlight Growing Threat.](#) *Newsweek*. December 22, 2014.

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